

If you have HEPATITIS C

ALMOST 4 MILLION AMERICANS ARE INFECTED
WITH HEPATITIS C VIRUS

This information will help you to better understand what hepatitis C is, how you may have gotten it, and what you can do to prevent passing hepatitis C virus to others

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What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of persons who have this disease. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person.

How serious is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of these persons have some liver damage but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some persons with liver damage due to hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure which may take many years to develop. Others have no long term effects.

What can I do now that my hepatitis C test is positive?

Contact your doctor. Additional tests may be needed to check your diagnosis and to see if you have liver damage.

What if I don't feel sick?

Many persons with long-term hepatitis C have no symptoms and feel well, but should still see their doctor. For some persons, the most common symptom is extreme tiredness.

How can I take care of my liver?

- See your doctor regularly.
- Do not drink alcohol.
- Tell your doctor about all medicines that you are taking, even over the counter and herbal medicines.
- If you have liver damage from hepatitis C, you should get vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Is there a treatment for hepatitis C?

Drugs are licensed for the treatment of persons with long-term hepatitis C. About 2-3 out of every 10 patients who are treated get rid of the virus. You should check with your doctor to see if treatment may help you.

How could I have gotten hepatitis C?

HCV is spread primarily by exposure to human blood. You may have gotten hepatitis C if:

- you ever injected street drugs, even if you experimented a few times many years ago.
- you were treated for clotting problems with a blood product made before 1987.
- you received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant (e.g., kidney, liver, heart) from an infected donor.
- you were ever on long-term kidney dialysis.
- you were ever a health care worker and had frequent contact with blood in the work place, especially accidental needlesticks.
- your mother had hepatitis C at the time she gave birth to you.
- you ever had sex with a person infected with HCV.
- you lived with someone who was infected with HCV and shared items such as razors or toothbrushes that might have had blood on them.

How can I prevent spreading HCV to others?

- Do not donate your blood, body organs, other tissue, or sperm.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles that might have your blood on them.
- Cover your cuts and open sores.
- If you have one steady sex partner, there is a very low chance of giving HCV to that partner and you do not need to change your sexual practices. If you want to lower the small chance of spreading HCV to your sex partner, you may want to use latex condoms. Ask your doctor about having your sex partner tested.

 *What if I am pregnant?*

Five out of every 100 infants born to HCV infected women become infected. This occurs at the time of birth, and there is no treatment that can prevent this from happening. However, infants infected with HCV at the time of birth seem to do very well in the first few years of life. More studies are needed to find out if these infants will have problems from the infection as they grow older.

 *Hepatitis C is NOT spread by:*

- breast feeding
- sneezing
- hugging
- coughing
- sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses
- food or water
- casual contact

 *If you use or inject street drugs:*

- Stop and get into a drug treatment program.
- If you cannot stop, do not reuse or share syringes, water, or drug works.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis B and hepatitis A.

 *If you are having sex, but not with one steady partner:*

- You and your partners can get diseases spread by having sex (e.g., AIDS, hepatitis B, gonorrhea or chlamydia). Use latex condoms correctly and all the time. The surest way to prevent the spread of any disease by sex is not to have sex at all.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis B.

There is no vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C

A person who has hepatitis C can still get other types of viral hepatitis, such as hepatitis A or hepatitis B.

For information on viral hepatitis:

call the Hepatitis Hotline at
1-888-4HEPCDC



1-888-443-7232
or *write* Hepatitis Branch, Mailstop G37
Division of Viral and Rickettsial Diseases
National Center for Infectious Diseases
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Atlanta, GA 30333

or

Contact your state or local health department